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THE COMING TARIFF LEGISLATION.

BY REPRESENTATIVE BENTON M'MILLIN, OF TENNESSEE, REPRESENTATIVE JOHN DALZELL, OF PENNSYLVANIA, AND REPRESENTATIVE WILLIAM J. BRYAN, OF NEBRASKA; ALL OF THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE.

THE HON. BENTON M'MILLIN:

WE HAVE now tried the tariff law of 1890 for three years. During that period the country has been under the highest rate of duty ever imposed here. Its authors boldly announced that it was not framed for revenue, but for protection. It was put into operation when the country was in a prosperous condition. To see what should be done in revising it, let us examine the nature of the measure, and the result of its operation.

It is the accumulation of many years of increase in tariff rates. When we started on the up grade of protection in 1861 we were told it was only temporary, to meet the expenses of a costly war, and when that war was over we should have a reduction. The war closed, but no relief came except to the manufacturers. The internal tax imposed on them when the import duties were increased was repealed. There was, it is true, a horizontal cut made of ten per cent. in the tariff rates in 1872, but only a few months elapsed before it was restored without adequate excuse. After many efforts by the Democracy to revise the tariff without success, the question was intensified by President Cleveland's famous message of 1887 to Congress urging tariff reform. The Mills Bill was framed and put through the House only to fail in the Republican Senate. When the Republicans came into full power under President Harrison they set about making a new tariff which outstripped all other protection measures, which should give capital

remunerative dividends, labor constant and better-paying employment, and prosperity to the entire country. According to its advocates and framers an industrial millennium was to dawn upon the entire country. The rates upon every schedule except one or two were greatly increased, while the taxes on many luxuries were permitted to stand where they were or were lowered; those on the necessities of life were made higher.

The manufacturers were called in and allowed to frame the schedules in which they were interested, and raised the duties to suit themselves. Whole sections of the bill were thus framed, and inserted bodily as they were made by interested parties; and are now a part of the law of the land. This is notably true of sections increasing the duty on women's dress goods, which was prepared by one of the greatest manufacturers of those goods. It was true of others. Does anyone deny this? The members of the Ways and Means Committee who "edited" the bill will not deny it. Sixty-five million people groan to-day under exactions prepared by interested makers of the articles taxed, and placed in the bill by their dictation. Is it strange that the burdens were made too grievous to be borne? Is it surprising that they made rates such that none but themselves could flourish. The framers of that bill found the average rate of duty a little more than 40 per cent., they left but little (if any) less than 60 per cent. They knew the farmer would complain about having the price of his clothing, his household and kitchen furniture, and his implements of industry thus increased by excessive taxes intended to enhance prices, while the price of the produce of his farm was fixed in the free-trade markets of the world in competition with the most poorly paid labor. They went through the farce of increasing largely the duty on corn, wheat, rye, and barley. They evidently thought the people very gullible. They put additional taxes upon raw materials, and still further weighted the industries of the country and oppressed the people using the goods. They repealed the sugar tax because nine-tenths of it went into the Treasury; and gave a bounty on sugar which was raised by a tax on other articles of necessity where three-fourths of the cost of taxation went to the manufacturers. Other bounties were provided—notably a bounty on silk.

Under pretext of bringing about reciprocity with other nations—which in this case was free trade on a small scale and to a

favoured few—they surrendered to the President the right to impose and remit taxes without calling on Congress or consulting the people.

Under this tariff gigantic trusts have been formed to restrict productions and put up prices. Whilst it is not contended that the formation of a trust is never seen or is impossible except under the influence of tariff laws, it is certainly true that their organization has been and is greatly facilitated by tariff laws which destroy or limit competition in production.

Such are some of the provisions of the law of 1890 which the Democratic party is called upon to revise. I defy anyone to show one laborer whose wages it has increased in the three years it has existed. A period of greater financial depression was never known in our history. Under it unemployed labor ready to work has begged bread in the streets and almost starved at home. Under it furnaces have been banked, factories have been shut down and foundries have ceased to glow. Under it there have been innumerable lockouts and reductions of wages. Under it the great increase of tariff rates has been accompanied by no corresponding increase in the wages of labor. Under it the rich farm lands of the country have continued to fall in price. To show that I do not overdraw the picture I quote from an article contributed by Mr. Andrew Carnegie to the September number of this REVIEW. After lauding the prosperity prior to 1890, he gives this gloomy but true account of years since that date :

“What a contrast to this picture the position of our country presents to-day. It is doubtful if a more disastrous financial cyclone ever blasted a country to such an extent in so short a time. . . . We see the woollen and cotton mills stop in New England, the blast furnaces closed throughout the South, banks and business firms failing to an extent before unknown, and hundreds of thousands of workmen idle, when before every one was employed. And while a few thousands engaged in business suffer, the sufferers among the wage-earning classes are already numbered by hundreds of thousands. The country has fallen from the apex of prosperity to the depths of industrial depression. Adversity has taken the place of prosperity, stagnation in business has succeeded activity, confidence has given place to distrust, and, as is always the case when business is disturbed, the chief part of the loss and suffering is falling, and must fall, upon the workmen—upon the poor millions and not upon the rich few.”

It is true the great manufacturer, whose own works unfortunately have confirmed the truth of his gloomy description, attributes the ills to other causes. Still the unprejudiced must

admit that very much has come from a system of unequal taxation, and all will admit the high taxes imposed have not been a remedy for any ill that afflicted the land.

And now the grave responsibility of revising and reducing this system of oppressive tariff devolves upon the Democratic party by reason of the great victory of 1892. For a quarter of a century that party has exhorted the people to return to the Democratic idea of reduced duties. By an unprecedented victory this party again comes into full power, and cannot and will not surrender the cause of tariff reform either by non action or inadequate action. To do so would be to acknowledge themselves either insincere or incapable. It would betray the high trust reposed in them. The Democratic party does not seek to tear down or injure our industries. Under it they flourished in the past. Under it they will flourish in the future. It seeks rather to place them on a firmer and surer basis; to extend their markets; to give them cheap raw materials, and then require them in return to forego some of the exactions they have been making upon our people. The people of this country can make more than they can eat or wear, and must find a market for their surplus or be reduced to enforced idleness periodically. Protection in Germany and France is often cited to justify it here. Nothing is proven by the citation. The situation of our people is entirely different from that of those countries. There, from half a million to three-quarters of a million of men in the prime of life, at the period of their greatest earning power, are taken from industrial pursuits and placed in the army, where they cease to be producers. All the time they go on consuming. Here we have no great navy, and no vast standing army drawing the flower of our young men from the industries and placing them where they cease to create wealth. Hence we have more need for markets to take the products of their labor.

Hearings are now in progress before the Ways and Means Committee and the manufacturers are urging non-action. Certain prints that perennially champion their cause take up the refrain and clamor in unison against tariff revision; or as they sometimes put it alliteratively—against “tinkering with the tariff”. This is no new sound. It has always been heard when reduction of duties was proposed, but never when an increase of rates was asked. They never complained at “tariff tinkering” when it was upwards, but abhor it when it has a tendency downwards.

When the country is prosperous they claim it will destroy prosperity to decrease the rates. When it is in panic they say it will retard prosperity to reduce them. Therefore, if we follow them we could never reduce taxes. There should be a general revision of the tariff and reduction of duties to a revenue basis. The reduction should be greatest in the necessities of life, and less on luxuries. So far as may be, raw materials should be made free, that manufactories may be unhampered in the competition of the world, and goods be supplied at a cheaper cost to our people. The right of the President to impose and remit taxes should be taken away as undemocratic and unAmerican. Taxes should be substituted for bounties, it being the object of government to impose taxes "for revenue" to carry on government; and not to raise money from one citizen to be paid over to another to increase his profits. Make the tariff what it should be. When this is done, we can regulate our revenues, as we do now, by our internal revenue taxes.

If more money is needed it can be obtained by an increase of the tax on spirits and by such other internal taxes as the Congress may in its discretion impose. Among other feasible means is a legacy tax which never makes its exactions till the party who worked for the money no longer needs it; till one is to get it who never earned it. There is no point where Government can with more propriety make a reasonable exaction for that protection through which alone it could have been accumulated than on large legacies and inheritances.

BENTON M'MILLIN.

THE HON. JOHN DALZELL:

THE interest generally attaching to the tariff question at this time has little relation to the correctness or incorrectness of any theory. Throughout the country, free-trader, protectionist, and the tariff reformer—who denies that he is either—alike compulsorily stand paralyzed in the presence of uncertainty. All men know that Congress is to revise the tariff; it is doubtful whether anyone knows how it is to be revised. Accurate foreknowledge now of coming legislation would mean fortune to its possessor. Doubt and distrust rule the hour. And not without good reason; the elements of uncertainty are many.

The party that for thirty years, with marvellous success,
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guided the destinies of the nation, has been expelled from power, and responsibility rests upon a party trained not to up-building but to down-pulling, not to construction but to opposition. Conceding to it the fullest measure of patriotic purpose, the fact remains that in this generation it has not had a chance to put into practice the art of governing. Nor does it appeal by its history to the confidence of the American people. While it brings to its responsible task a recent record of inexperience it brings also an earlier record full of disaster.

One of the characteristic features of Republican rule is the system of protection. By its means home industries have been developed to a variety, importance and wealth difficult of accurate measurement, and the field of remunerative labor enlarged to the wonderful material prosperity and moral and social advancement of the wage-earner. The assertion is incontrovertible that never in our history were the necessities of life cheaper, or wages and the condition of labor on a higher plane, than when Mr. Harrison went out of office. Without claiming this condition of things to be due solely to the system of protection, it must be admitted that that system is entitled to a large, if not the largest, amount of credit therefor. But even if it be granted that the protective system had nothing to do with it, still it must be conceded that a large proportion of our people believe to the contrary; and a prevailing popular sentiment is potential in influencing social and economic conditions.

Suddenly, inexplicably, the people—as was their right—at the last Presidential election changed for a time the party of their choice, and placed the Democratic party in charge of all the departments of government. That party came into power upon a platform that would reverse the industrial policy of a third of a century.

A glance at the history of that platform's adoption will not be without profit. Had it been adopted as originally reported to the Convention it would have contained, with respect to the tariff, this declaration:

“In making tariff reduction in taxes, it is not proposed to injure any domestic industries, but rather to promote their healthy growth. From the foundation of this Government taxes collected at the custom-house have been the chief source of Federal revenue. Such they must continue to be. Moreover, many industries have come to rely upon legislation for successful continuance, so that any change of law must be at every step regardful of the labor and capital thus involved.”

This declaration the Convention deliberately refused to make, and in strong contrast with it thus announced the party creed :

“ We denounce Republican protection as a fraud, a robbery of the great majority of the American people for the benefit of the few. We declare it to be a fundamental principle of the Democratic party that the Federal Government has no constitutional power to impose and collect tariff duties, except for the purpose of revenue only, etc., etc.”

If we could accept a Democratic platform as meaning what it says there would not now be any uncertainty as to the future of our tariff policy. Assuming honesty in a Democratic convention in formulating the creed of the Democratic party, the horoscope of our tariff future is easy to be read.

Protective duties are to be abolished ; they are unconstitutional, and a tariff whose sole purpose shall be revenue is to be enacted, that is to say a tariff so levied as to raise the greatest amount of revenue by the imposition of the least rate of duty. The legitimate subjects of such duty are the necessities of life, tea, coffee, sugar and the like.

The result of such tariff is easy to predict. The mine, the mill, the furnace and the factory must cease to operate, or the owner thereof must put himself on the plane of his foreign business rival, and so in the last analysis the burden will fall on the wage-earner reduced to the level of his foreign competitor.

But how is it possible to believe that the platform of the party now in power necessarily indicates that party's intended policy ?

In the remarkable debate recently concluded in the House of Representatives on the silver question nothing was made so conspicuous as the uncertainty attaching to the proper interpretation of the Democratic platform. The most familiar instance of each day's debate was the assertion by one Democrat that the money plank of that platform was a distinct pledge in favor of free and unlimited silver coinage, and the assertion by another Democrat that it was exactly the reverse. By Democratic construction the platform seems to have been intended for convenient service, equally well suited to Colorado and to New York and New England, a good enough lure alike for Wall Street and the prairie.

Furthermore, time and again in that same debate the announcement was made that party platforms mean nothing, and that the candidate is the exponent of party principles and policy. How much this means, a glance at the vote upon the bill repeal-

ing the purchase clause of the Sherman Act and the attitude of prominent Democrats with respect thereto will make very apparent. Representatives in great numbers, and grave and reverend senators, heretofore the advocates, in speech, in the press and in magazine articles, of free and unlimited silver coinage, jostled each other in their mad haste to sustain the policy recommended by the President. Like Saul of Tarsus, they were suddenly converted by a great light. The light, we may allow, came from heaven, but by way of reflection from the White House.

With respect to tariff revision there is as much ground for uncertainty as to Democratic intentions as there was in connection with silver legislation. It is true that the Chicago Convention refused to embody in its declaration of principles a denial of any intention to injure any domestic industry. It is equally true that, having deliberately rejected this proposition, it declared in terms that a tariff except for revenue was unconstitutional. But then, again, it is also true, that Mr. Cleveland has uniformly coupled with his declarations in favor of tariff revision a pledge against harmful interference with industrial interests and the wages of labor.

"In a readjustment," said he, "of our tariff, the interests of American labor engaged in manufacture should be carefully considered, as well as the preservation of our manufacturers." That he is not a believer in the doctrine of Calhoun and the Chicago platform that protection is unconstitutional is clear. He says "it may be called protection, or by any other name, but relief from the hardships of our present tariff laws should be devised with especial precaution against imperilling the existence of our manufacturing interests."

Will the party in power embody in legislation the declaration of its platform and erase from the statute book protective duties as unconstitutional; or will it follow the voice of its leader and revise the tariff, "with especial precaution against imperilling the existence of our manufacturing interests"?

This is a question upon the answer to which tens of thousands of American men, women and children anxiously stand waiting in the hush of idleness. It ought not to remain unanswered long.

No forecast of the future of legislation can approach accuracy that ignores the dominant influence of local interests. Free trade

is always a lovely thing in theory and on paper, and sometimes a good thing in practice ; but the latter is the case only when it operates in some other person's congressional district. The average voter—and his member of Congress does not differ from him—may be very devoted to principle when making party platforms, but when laws are to be made it is interest rather than principle that he wants considered. Free raw material would, beyond doubt, be a prominent feature of any bill framed by a Democratic Congress if there was no raw material in any Democratic district ; if, however, such material should exist in such district, it is safe to say that it would not be deprived of tariff protection—at least, by the vote of the congressman therefrom. It will be remembered that when the Mills Bill came from the Ways and Means Committee, in the Fiftieth Congress, it had a conformity to theory which it sadly lacked when passed upon by the House. One by one articles produced in Democratic districts were transferred from the free to the dutiable list, and, in some cases, duties were advanced, as the price of Democratic votes.

Aside from this influence proceeding from particular districts, it must be borne in mind that there is a dominant force in the prevailing popular opinion which always influences legislation. And, whatever claims may be made from a partisan standpoint as to the real meaning of the political revolution of the last election, it would seem impossible of belief that the American people really intend to abandon the policy of protection. Any party undertaking to legislate upon that assumption must anticipate speedy rebuke and defeat.

It is to be remembered that the National Treasury is now in a depleted condition, and that its main source of replenishment must be customs duties. To accurately foretell the effect upon the revenue of a change in duties is an utter impossibility, and there probably never was a time in our history when there was more danger to be apprehended from tariff revision than now. This fact is, of course, appreciated by those in control of legislation and must largely influence their judgment against any radical experimental measures.

The elements that produce uncertainty in the present situation are the newness of the Democratic party to power, the meaninglessness of Democratic platforms as outlining party legislation, and the existence of a divided sentiment amongst Democrats upon

the question of protection ; while some elements to be considered on the other hand are the effect on legislation of local interests, the influence of general popular opinion, the necessity for revenue, and the existing conditions which render radical or experimental legislation dangerous.

It being generally accepted as inevitable that the tariff is to be revised, it seems to be of the utmost importance that it be done speedily. Capital and labor alike, to a large extent, stand idle awaiting the result, desirous of adapting themselves to new conditions. And if there are to be new conditions, it would seem to be the part of wisdom to give some time to capital and labor to prepare to meet them. No tariff law ought to be enacted to go into immediate effect ; its operation should be postponed a reasonable time so as to interfere as little as possible with the prosecution of the business of the country.

JOHN DALZELL.

THE HON. WILLIAM J. BRYAN :

IN so far as elections can determine a political principle the elections of 1890 and 1892 have committed this country to a tariff for revenue only. The immediate cause of this emphatic expression of public sentiment was due to the attempt on the part of the protected interests to push their battle line a little further forward, notwithstanding a popular demand for tariff reduction. This last move, on the part of those who, grown rich at public expense, added arrogance to their wealth, focussed public attention upon the issue and in the succeeding conflict all arguments in favor of the protective principle were met and answered.

In the earlier days of the Republic the main argument made in favor of a protective tariff was that it would encourage the establishment of new industries and guard them from competition with older foreign rivals until they became firmly rooted. Such a tariff was intended to be temporary only. Mr. Hamilton said in his report on manufactures in 1791 :

"The continuance of bounties on manufactures long established must always be of questionable policy, because a presumption would arise in every such case that there were natural and inherent impediments to success."

Mr. Clay said in 1833 :

"The theory of protection supposes, too, that after a certain time the protected arts will have acquired such strength and perfection as will enable them subsequently, unaided, to stand against foreign competition."

And again in 1840 :

"No one, Mr. President, in the commencement of the protective policy, ever supposed that it was to be perpetual."

Time, however, exhausted that argument. The child becomes ashamed to nurse as it grows older, but the industrial infant is not separated from the breast by any such sentimental reason. It is as scantily endowed with modesty as it is plentifully supplied with appetite, but, as the industry could no longer conceal its corpulent body and its extending limbs in childhood's attire, it sought some new excuse for continued public support, while it changed its attitude from that of a temporary ward of the nation to that of a permanent charge upon all profitable industries. The contention now is that we are not able to compete upon even terms with industries in foreign lands and that the government must make good the difference either directly by a bounty, as in the case of sugar production, or indirectly by a protective tariff, as in the case of wool.

Mr. Lawrence, of Ohio, in addressing the wool growers in a speech made about two years ago, said :

"And these are the existing conditions. In Australia merino wool can be and is produced at a less cost than it can be in the United States, because (1) pasturage can be had there for a few cents an acre, and (2) the climate there is such that substantially no winter feeding is required. The same is true of South America."

As protectionists do not claim that their system will reduce the price of pasturage or moderate the climate so as to make winter feeding unnecessary, they must defend the wool tariff as a perpetual tax. The same is true of other industries where the tariff is maintained for the ostensible purpose of paying higher wages than are paid abroad. As it is not contended that protection will finally reduce wages and thus enable us to reduce the tariff, protection in these cases must be justified as a permanent system by which the price of certain goods shall be increased by operation of law for the immediate benefit of those who produce the goods and for the pretended benefit ultimately of every one else. The operation of the tariff is simple. Under a 50 per cent. duty an article worth \$1 is imported, the 50 per cent. duty added,

and the consumer buys it for \$1.50, plus expenses and profits. This tax is either paid by the foreigner who sells to us, or by the consumer in this country, who finally uses the article. If paid by the foreigner, then in the case above referred to the foreigner reduces his price from \$1.50 to \$1, so that when the duty is paid the price with the tariff will be the same that it would have been without the tariff. To show the absurdity of this position it is not necessary to inquire why the protectionist advocates such a variety of duties (why not treat all foreign nations alike and subject them to equal duties?), but it is sufficient to say that a tariff which is not paid by the consumer is of no benefit to the protected industry. If the producer of the protected article receives the same price for his goods with or without a tariff, what difference does it make to him whether the duty be high or low? If he cannot compete without the aid of a tariff, how can it help him except by enabling him to charge a higher price for his product? How can he charge a higher price unless he can compel the consumer to pay it? And how can he compel the consumer to pay it unless the tariff increases to the consumer the price of the competing article? The only reasonable or logical purpose of the tariff, therefore, is to compel the consumer to buy at home at a high price by preventing a purchase abroad at a lower price. It is here that the principle of protection violates the right of the individual, and its establishment disregards the spirit if not the letter of the constitution.

In what is known as the "Topeka, Kansas, Case" (20 *Wall*, 655), the decision of the Court contains these words:

"To lay with one hand the power of the Government on the property of the citizen, and with the other to bestow it upon favored individuals to aid private enterprises and build up private fortunes, is none the less a robbery because it is done under the forms of law and is called taxation. This is not legislation. It is a decree under legislative forms.

"If it be said that a benefit results to the local public of a town by establishing manufactures, the same may be said of any other business or pursuit which employs capital or labor. The merchant, the mechanic, the innkeeper, the banker, the builder, the steamboat-owner, are equally promoters of the public good, and equally deserving the aid of the citizens by forced contributions. No line can be drawn in favor of the manufacturer which would not open the coffers of the public treasury to the importunities of two-thirds of the business men of the city or town."

In other words, it means that the sheriff, representing the

power of the law, shall not collect from the individual a sum to be given by the government as a bounty to a more favored individual. Will it be contended, then, that while this cannot be done directly by a tax or a bounty, that it is more lawful for the sheriff to hold one individual while the more favored individual collects the bounty from him himself through an increased price secured by a protective tariff ?

If it is difficult to defend the principle of transferring one man's money to another man's pocket by law, it is equally difficult to defend the policy of such a system. Whenever a legislative body announces that it has opened up business for that purpose, it is at once besieged by those who seek to use the taxing power for private gain.

Assuming that no member can be bribed, either directly by cash in hand, or indirectly by the promise of contributions to campaign funds, or by pledges of the votes of employees, there is still great danger that the beneficiary will obtain an unfair advantage over the tax-payer, because the former is ever present and clamorous, while the latter silently bears the load because it is impossible for him to present any petition or protest other than that which he places in the ballot-box. He who defends protection must prove, first, that it is right in principle ; second, that it is wise ; third, that its application is necessary to the extent asked. It is safe to say that the advocates of the system do not attempt to establish these three necessary propositions. They presume that it is right, assume that it is wise, and take it for granted that it is necessary. In attempting to show that we must have a tariff duty in order to enable our industries to exist they content themselves with showing a difference in wages per day in favor of our employees, whereas the only test is the labor cost of the article produced. The pay per day is wholly immaterial. The labor cost is material. In most of our industries, while manufacturers pay higher wages per day they get more work for the same amount of money than foreign manufacturers. There are innumerable instances where our manufacturers compete in foreign markets without protection with the pauper labor of the world, and yet where they persistently demand a tariff, in order to produce goods for sale in this country, where they have the advantage of transportation, even if they had no tariff.

In order to maintain a protective system the beneficiaries of

the tariff have been compelled to stand together, and those who were demanding a tariff upon raw material could count on the assistance of those favoring a tariff on manufactured goods, although the tariff on the raw material was a burden to the manufacturer. So long as raw material is taxed our manufacturers are at a disadvantage when thrown into competition with those producing like goods in countries where no such tax is levied. To relieve our industries to some extent of this disadvantage the law has provided for a rebate to the exporting manufacturer nearly equal to the duty paid on the imported raw material. This provision, however, offers to the manufacturer an inducement to buy his raw material abroad rather than in this country, and in that way operates against the home producer of raw material, and it also enables the manufacturer to sell his product abroad cheaper than he can sell it at home. The fact that the manufacturer is thus encouraged to sell to the foreigner for less than to the man living by the side of the factory is one cause of the uprising against the system.

In the reform of the tariff which will soon be made the duty will in all probability be removed from a number of articles classed as raw material. Those who consume manufactured articles recognize that any tariff placed upon the material from which the goods are made must at last find its way to the consumer, and those who are anxious that our industries may be employed, not a portion, but all, of the year, recognize that the only way to secure this is to place manufacturers on even terms in respect to their material with foreign producers of like articles.

The reduction of the tariff instead of resulting in damage to this country and its industries will give employment to more people and will give to the consumers of protected articles an advantage by taking away from the manufacturer the right to impose not only unjust but unnecessary burdens upon the rest of the people.

WILLIAM J. BRYAN.